

External Consultant's Report
on the Concordia University Dance Department
Submitted by Sara Porter
April 2001

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Introduction / Overview

I would like to begin this report with an expression of my great pleasure at conducting this review of the Concordia University dance department. I found the department, its faculty, staff and students to be exceptionally content, motivated and productive, and part of a well-functioning structure that seems, on the whole, to exhibit few problems and express very few complaints.

The Concordia University dance department has built and maintained a considerable reputation amongst dance artists and the Canadian modern/ contemporary dance community over the past twenty years as an institution committed to creative research and developing the individual creativity of each student in its program. The success of the department is evident by the numerous graduates over the years who have pursued, and attained, productive and visible careers in contemporary dance in Canada.

The Concordia dance department enjoys the benefit of its geographical location in Montreal – considered to be a centre of innovation in contemporary dance in Canada. The dance department shares this focus toward innovation and likely benefits by attracting students who are eager to become acquainted with the city's dance community outside the university setting. The department also offers a gateway for English speaking students to study under English (language) instruction and familiarize themselves with the francophone dance community gradually.

The department's particular focus on student's individual approach to choreography is expressly stated in the department's mission statement: *The contemporary dance program emphasizes the discovery and development of the creative and technical capacity of the individual student towards choreography and performance.* The Concordia dance department is unique in this regard amongst Canadian university dance departments (of which there are only four). It is my opinion that the strength and success of Concordia's dance department rests, in part, on its clear expression and consistent commitment to this mandate.

Complementing this commitment to nurturing the individuality of its students is the small size of the department. The focus on individual students' distinct and particular interests is made possible, in part, by the small size of its classes. It is noteworthy that the department has neither grown nor shrunk considerably in past years, and has sustained its reputation over two decades.

The overall impression from my two-day visit to the department is one a tightly-knit, self-sufficient department with a clear focus, and healthy working practices, that is active and successful in its own small corner of the university. With about twenty incoming students per year (an overall complement of about fifty students) and a faculty proportionately compact in numbers, the department exhibits a great feeling of cooperation, consideration and compatibility amongst staff, faculty, and students alike. This is a particular accomplishment in an environment that can be prone to excessive competition and tension amongst large 'personalities'. Some of this apparent cohesion may stem from the department's relative seclusion from the rest of the university (expanded on later) due to its setting on the edges of the Loyola campus, and that the group is successful in working together in the face of limited resources. Much credit is due to the

leaders/directors of this department for engendering, and maintaining, such an environment of trust and respect.

My interviews with the student group revealed considerable self-awareness with regard to their expectations of the program. The students stated that they applied to Concordia dance department because of its explicit and particular focus, and have been satisfied because their particular expectations have been fulfilled.

The subject of 'dance' is a relatively recent addition to the university setting and some would argue that in many ways is not an easy or obvious fit into an institution of traditionally academic pursuits. Fine Arts departments and courses are notoriously expensive in the university setting, with a very high cost per student. Concordia's dance department has managed, on limited resources, to establish itself as a centre of innovation in developing Canadian choreographers and perspectives on contemporary dance, and maintain a consistent presence in the national scene over many years, while maintaining itself as a financially sustainable entity within the university.

The department does, however, face very real limitations in various regards, including faculty energy and financial resources, which require due attention. There has been a significant shift over the past few years with the retirement of the founder of the dance department who served as chair and full-time faculty member for over twenty years. Her retirement has had significant impact on the department and it seems that, after a couple of years of shifting, the department has stabilized once again. The department has also absorbed a recent budget cut which has necessitated specific cutbacks within the department (such as cutting back on a musical accompaniment once a week). The department sustains a clear commitment to 'do what we do best'. There are particular areas which, in my opinion, would benefit from applied attention and, perhaps, some consideration toward change. My main concerns (articulated in more depth further on in this report) include the department's relationship to the library, the shortage of library resources relevant to the department's program, the question of safety in the downtown rehearsal studios, the department's one academic course in dance history, and the possible re-instatement of a third full-time faculty position. Some of these considerations do have financial ramifications and obviously would require more financial support. However, they do not all require additional funds to be implemented to a beneficial degree.

I would like to stress that it is my intention in this report to take care in articulating my concerns and recommendations to change, because too much disruption to working practices and structures of demonstrated and continued success may prove, at best, distracting, and at worst, counter-productive.

i. Outline of the visit

My visit to Concordia University's dance department occurred on March 26-27, 2001. The first day of interviews took place at the Loyola campus and included meetings with the following groups/individuals: a mixed group of (about ten) undergraduate dance major students from all three years of study, the single administrative staff member of the dance department, five of the part-time teaching faculty (studio teachers). I then conducted interviews with the two full-time dance department faculty (including the chair). My visit included observing three levels of technique classes in progress (briefly), as well as two levels of creative process classes in progress (briefly). I toured the dance department facilities: three dance studios upstairs and one

multi-purpose studio shared with the theatre department on lower/main floor. I also visited the central administration/ departmental offices. I visited the Loyola campus library and interviewed the librarian responsible for purchasing for, and maintaining, the dance collection. Finally, I visited the IITS (Loyola campus technical support / equipment services and supplies) and interviewed two people there who showed me the facilities and equipment.

The second day of my visit was spent on the main (downtown) campus of Concordia university. I met with the Dean of Fine Arts, the University Appraisal Committee, the Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs, and finally, with the Provost/Vice President Research..This concluded my visit.

After the two day visit, I had additional phone conversations with both a part-time teacher and with the chair of the department.

ii. Faculty

I consider the faculty complement, on the whole, to include experienced, well-resourced individuals committed to, and capable of, fulfilling the departmental mandate. I was able to observe various classes on the first day of my visit and found the level of technical demand instudio to be high and challenging to the students. The creative process classes I observed also appeared lively and stimulating with students fully engaged in well-structured explorations directed by faculty.

Part-time vs full-time

The faculty of the Concordia University dance department is particular in its composition, in that there is a very high ratio of part-time to full-time faculty. There are currently eleven (11) part-time faculty members and two (2) full-time faculty members in permanent positions. There are obvious benefits and limitations to this distribution that are elaborated below.

First, I will say that the part-time faculty are highly-qualified, experienced working dance professionals with pertinent expertise in their artform. They are all active members of the Montreal dance community with some international exposure in both choreography and performance. They are, on the whole, artists in the middle of their careers. There are no very senior, nor very junior, faculty. From the teaching observed and the interviews conducted, I found the quality of instruction to be exceptionally high. There is great benefit to the department, and students, to having part-time instructors that concurrently maintain active careers as artists. With little administrative responsibility in the department, their energies focus on developing their own creative work, which, in turn, means their teaching is continually resourced from new research and professional activity. The students gain enormously from this connection with artists active in their field. The students articulated the great benefit and pleasure of going to see an instructor's show in downtown Montreal one evening, then being in class with them the following day. This direct connection very rich for the students, ensuring they familiarize themselves with theatres and dance facilities in the dance community, and exposing them to a broad variety of dance venues and work.

Work load

My concern that part-timers would be overworked and contributing more than their contracted hours was unsubstantiated. The part-timers seemed content with the demands placed on them, did not feel overextended (by departmental demands) and expressed satisfaction with their level of implication in the department as a whole. They are on campus most days and available to students after classes. The students seem satisfied with the potential time limitations of the part-time faculty, and that perhaps there was a more 'hands off' approach to teaching, a direct result of the instructors outside commitments, but seemed to suggest it demanded maturity and independence on the part of the students. There was no complaint about this from amongst the students interviewed: Not only does this direct connection open students' experience to the professional world, it keeps the information coming into the department, through part-time instructors, fresh and current.

On the other hand, I would suggest that the two full-time faculty who are responsible for managing and running the department, and provide its backbone of support and vision, bring a great expertise and experience to the department. Their commitment is commendable. They do, however, bear too much administrative load and are in danger of overextending themselves possibly to the detriment of some aspects of the department. (See *Research*, below) There is little leeway for relief from full responsibilities of chairing the department as the two full-time faculty members can only trade off between themselves. The negative impact of this considerable administrative responsibility is evident in a reduced amount of research conducted outside the university setting.

Retirements

The recent (and only) departmental retirement was by long-time chair and founder of the program (Elizabeth Langley). This retirement threatened to have a significant impact on the department as a whole. Despite the period of shifting and re-balancing inevitable with this kind of departure, the department has restabilized and adjusted well to its new parameters and personnel. It seems that a certain transparency of working methods has emerged that allows for more sharing of responsibilities amongst the three full-time positions (including one full-time administrator). This may seem too personal an arena for inclusion in this report, but I remarked that the two full-time faculty and the administrator all have young families and, in sharing information about departmental workings, are able to cover for each other when the inevitable family responsibilities impose themselves. This kind of covering for each other's roles/administrative responsibilities seems to enhance the ethos of cooperation and group working that is evident amongst the students and promoted in the classrooms.

There are no pending retirements that require immediate consideration.

Faculty Research

The part-time faculty can commit a significant amount of time outside their teaching commitments to maintain extensive artistic careers and continue to develop professionally. This maintenance of a parallel creative career greatly benefits the department as it brings a freshness to the department's studios and students that will help keep course content current with the broader contemporary dance community. The benefits to the students is also outlined above, most particularly, connecting the students to the community directly through their teachers and offering concrete examples of artists' careers in action.

Conversely, the detriment to such a proportion of full-time to part-time faculty means that the two full-time faculty and single administrator are solely responsible for the running of the departmental affairs. This administrative burden is high, and I question whether full-time faculty are able to conduct significant and independent research projects themselves. I understood, through discussion, that much research was considered to be focused back directly into teaching. I did not understand this research to manifest itself in any other significant, productive form external to manifestation in teaching. Ultimately, this type of research will benefit the interaction with students; my question rests in the domain of the full-time faculty's ability – with the administrative responsibilities – to pursue significant research projects independent of teaching demands.

RECOMMENDATION (#7): A third full-time faculty position be re-instated and maintained to broaden the base of administrative and full-time faculty support in running the department. I understand a third position was instigated and then not resumed during the period of transition after the retirement of Elizabeth Langley. I make this recommendation with a vision to the longer term growth of the department as I realize the high budgetary implication of this recommendation.

iii. Admission standards and procedures

Admission procedures are appropriate and in keeping with the mandate of the program, including technique class and showing of applicant's work in studio. This immediate attention to the individuality of the applicant/student prepares both faculty and student for the focus of individual training. One recent and minor alteration to the admission procedures is the department's requirement of an earlier commitment from the incoming student to first year. As this is a new initiative, I believe the outcome is yet to be determined as to its success. However, it is in the interest of confirming incoming student numbers earlier to better prepare for the upcoming term. This is positive alteration to admission procedures that will aid in assuring a certain number of incoming students.

The faculty seem to consider that the quality of incoming students recently has been rising. I have no means to support or challenge this claim. However, I can say with certainty that the quality, motivation and maturity of the students I observed and interviewed were excellent.

The department has added a modest complement of summer courses in dance that appears to have both increased enrollments and proven to be a successful recruitment vehicle for attracting students into the full-time dance program.

Departmental brochures and information are attractive and informative. They clearly state the objectives of the program – again, something I consider one of the department's clear strengths.

iv. Adequacy of student support

The students benefit from great personal support from the faculty and departmental staff. There appear to be significant resources available to students from the university community at large.

vi. Student completion rates and student retention

The department saw a decline in retention rates during the transitional period immediately following the departure of Elizabeth Langley, the founder of Concordia's dance program and long-time faculty member who recently retired. While this shift posed potential difficulties, the decline seems to have righted itself again as the departmental transitions and shifts in staff and faculty have once again stabilized. The department has addressed the need to retain students by implementing specific measures, including promoting upper level Independent Studies courses to connect students to the professional community, and responding to student request for more technique classes by opening up options for increased training within the department. These two issues are elaborated below.

Familiar Themes re: retention

There appear to be two regular themes when considering possible problems that affect student retention in dance departments. To my experience, they are recurrent in most university dance programs I have encountered. One is a clear complaint from students that they wish to dance more (addressed further under *curricular demands*) and the second is upper level students' great eagerness (often to the point of frustration) to be 'out in the professional world'. Dance students are generally very eager to begin their professional careers and sometimes can have unreal expectations about their own readiness to enter the profession. This eagerness to succeed can bring great energy to their working practices, but inevitably, some students feel 'held back' by the university demands and feel that undue limitations are being placed on them by the institution. Sometimes this is true, but often, it simply reflects a student's impatience with the process of education. I would consider that Concordia's particular focus on the individual's creativity does much to alleviate this tension, allowing students' energy to flourish in class and creative projects devised around their own individual artistic and aesthetic concerns.

Steps taken

These concerns over student retention, however, remain real. The two themes expressed above are also apparent amongst Concordia's students. The department has implemented measures to address the need to retain students through to final year and to encourage degree completion.

- (1) One of these successful additions has been the implementation of a third year course called Independent Studies. Such a course is highly appropriate and seemingly appealing to students on the verge of graduation. Additional to encouraging independence through projects conducted outside the department and university setting, such a course/project provides a structured link to the professional dance community that can prove very valuable after a student's graduation. Such links have been made with Studio 303, a small and innovative studio in downtown Montreal that houses alternative dance training, rental studio space, and monthly performances of new and experimental dance and performance work.
- (2) To the express student concern about shortcomings to technical training ("not enough") within the department, the department has responded with the possibility of a student enrolling in two levels of technique simultaneously, thereby doubling the access to technical training. This possibility is opened up in exceptional circumstances only but does exist for the student who pursues it. I have addressed the concern of lack of technical training elsewhere but include it here as a note on departmental initiatives to respond to this much-voiced complaint.

As noted above in *Admission Procedures*, the department has successfully initiated summer courses in dance that have proven successful in recruiting students to the department. However, the department expressed the need for university support in addressing the issues of retention and recruitment, as currently, the budget for such expenses rests directly on the department.

vii. Adequacy of library resources

My tour of the library consisted of viewing both the reference and lendable material in the stacks, looking at the scope and content of the periodical section and the video collection, and investigating the computer search equipment/systems.

The students interviewed expressed displeasure at the library resources, suggesting the books were outdated, that there were not sufficient number of videos of current contemporary dance works, and that the choice of periodicals was irrelevant to their course of study. There was also some acknowledgment by the full-time faculty that the communication between the dance department and the library personnel was underdeveloped and, as a result, the library resources were not as relevant to the course of study as would be desirable. I found these two suggestions to be true.

Book collection

While there are some very good pockets of material/information, and some current publications from the dance milieu, there are very large gaps and some very irrelevant collections that are too tangential to the departmental mandate to have significant value to the students or faculty. The directories are outdated; the dictionaries are focused on traditional modern dance and ballet. Generally, there is not nearly the scope of resources that the department needs to satisfactorily support its curriculum. The departmental chair expressed full recognition of these shortcomings and expressed lack of human resources as a contributing factor toward the weakness of the relationship to the library and enhancing its resources.

Video collection

The video collection on dance -- consisting of fewer than 100 items -- is small. Additionally, its contents are weak and outdated. For a dance department focusing on creating current contemporary dance, I feel the resources should be more significant. Music, visual art, and literature are easily reproducible *en masse* for study. Dances are not so easy to 'attain' for similar familiarity with developments in the international scene. Access to affordable video has changed that in the dance world. While licensing laws can add expense to acquiring videos for 'educational/classroom/public showing' use, single videos of artists' works can be purchased for 'private viewing' (ie, at home, or by a student in the library) at much lower cost. This option should be investigated. Dance students need to know, not only what they are doing, but what is going on in the world around them. Viewing dances by artists from diverse contemporary dance cultures/communities is essential for the aesthetic maturing/experience of a young choreographer. (There are some excellent BBC and RM Arts dance films/videos/documentaries, as well as videos of works by Mark Morris, Bill. T. Jones, Merce Cunningham, William Forsythe, DV8, CandoCo, Nederlands Dans Theatre, to name a few).

Periodicals

A similar situation exists in the periodical collection. There was some confusion about the status of acquiring periodicals for the library. I understood from one source that no new periodicals

were being purchased, and from another source that no new subscriptions were being initiated. I learned from the dance librarian that subscriptions could be transferred from one publication to another, but that no additional subscriptions were being added. Some transferrals of subscriptions should be made to include journals such as *Dance Theatre Journal*, and *Ballet International*.

Purchasing

The full-time faculty expressed their frustration and disappointment at the weak relationship between the library and the department, particularly with regards to purchasing current and relevant material. The dance librarian informed me that the library's annual purchasing budget for dance is about \$1100. These resources need to be better directed and utilized.

RECOMMENDATION (#2) : There should be a review of the relationship between the library and the department. There needs to be a better link (from the library) to agencies/organizations that distribute current dance literature and videos, and with whom there could be potential for exchange and borrowing privileges. There are many dance videos available for purchase (with varying costs of viewing licenses) and university dance students should have access to a wider array of international dance works on video. Concurrently, there needs to be a review of the dance periodicals policy/practice to ensure the budget is being directed to augment the current collection with publications more relevant to the Concordia Dance department's course of study.

viii. Adequacy of office and studio space, and physical resources/facilities

There appears to be adequate office space for administrative purposes and for full-time faculty to conduct work and hold meetings – both publicly and privately. There are student lockers and areas for leisure to answer to student needs.

Studios

A recurring concern expressed by both faculty and students is the need for better and/or additional studio spaces. While there are three well-kept studios for the exclusive use of the dance department, class schedules require the 'borrowing' of an additional studio downstairs in the theatre department that is shared with theatre classes. This is not so inconvenient, however it raises the next main concern regarding studio facilities.

It is essential for dance studio floors to be kept meticulously clean. This is a particular demand of contemporary dance because of the use of lying down, and rolling on the floor, that is intrinsic to many movement techniques. While efforts are made to remove shoes at the door, the floors get dirty daily and need meticulous care. This care is not currently being paid to the dance studios at Concordia/Loyola. Staff, students and faculty all expressed concern about lack of consistency and/or thoroughness in cleaning the studios. This poses a very real health hazard to students required to walk and dance barefoot in the studios everyday. It seems a central contractor is responsible for the cleaning/building maintenance and is not reliable.

An additional concern was the facility downtown in the main campus (GW Building?) that is used by dance students for after hours rehearsals. I was led to believe the studios are highly unsanitary and unsafe. The students claimed that birds gain access to the building and the floors shows signs of defecation. Additionally, it seems there are no security measures to ensure the safety of students rehearsing in the evenings/nights. The doors cannot be locked and there are no

surveillance devices to allow for remote surveillance. Additionally, there are no telephone facilities. [I was not able to visit these facilities during this trip, however I have done so on previous occasion. Both full-time and part-time faculty seemed to concur that this facility was not maintained at an acceptable level of sanitation and safety.]

RECOMMENDATION (#3): Upgrade the two downtown studios, implementing safety features and upgrading cleanliness standards.

Accompanists

There is a perceived shortage of musical accompanists for technique classes. The accompanist is essential to the running of a traditional contemporary dance class: s/he responds to the teacher's focus in any exercise and works toward enhancing the student's aesthetic and rhythmic training in studio. The interplay between teacher and live accompanist is essential for the student to understand the complexities of rhythm, phrasing, metre, and many other aspects of the relationship between sound and movement. The Concordia department has employed some very proficient and inspiring musical accompanists. The complaint from students and part-time faculty is that, following budgetary considerations, the accompanist are not present for every technique class. They are hired to play three out of four classes during the week. This leaves the technique teachers one class a week without live accompaniment. While I agree it is essential to the development of a professional dancer to work with live music, it is also very possible to conduct very productive physical/artistic training without a live accompanist. I consider this cutback to be well-advised, and while potentially frustrating to students/teachers unaccustomed to such a set-up, I feel it is a wise trimming for budgetary demands.

ix. Adequacy of technological support

The dance department itself appears to have an adequate supply of video recorders and playback equipment as well as music equipment. My tour of the ITSS similarly revealed an ample supply of video and sound recording and playback equipment as well as production necessities such as amplification and other electrical and electronic systems. This equipment is available to students for projects and productions.

There appears to be adequate computing equipment for students' use, however, the students I interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with the hours of operation of the computer rooms. The computer rooms are not open after 11pm or on the weekends. All of the students interviewed expressed interest and need for 24-hour access.

x. Curriculum requirements and/or professional training and preparation for practice

The course outlines and content appear clear and appropriate. Some of the upcoming additions to the program include an anatomy course with somatic training for dancers, and a production course to enhance student experience/expertise in completing final productions of their choreography. These are timely additions to the curriculum considering increased available human resources within the department.

Curricular cohesiveness

I have noted the considerable consistency over the years in the dance department's commitment to following a specific curriculum focusing on preparing students to work as contemporary dance artists. The curriculum stresses three clear avenues: (1) basic to intermediate technical training in contemporary dance technique(s), (2) investigation into, exploration of, and practice in the creative process intrinsic to making dances, and (3) building choreography. Students are required to take additional courses to fulfill degree requirements, but the thrust of the program lies in these three avenues. While the courses' demands and structure are clear, the students conduct creative work independently from class-time and, thus, must rely on their own maturity and discipline to bring the work to completion. I will address independently each class I observed.

Technique classes

During my visit, I viewed three levels of technique classes in process. The students were challenged and working well. The accompanists were well-implicated in the class. As stated earlier, I was impressed at the level of technical challenge given to the students. The movement content was current and interesting and relevant to their course of studying movement exploration and contemporary dance.

However, I have a question pertaining to the cohesiveness of the vision for technique classes. The great benefit of a rotation of professional technique teachers from the Montreal dance community means a strong connection for the students with the professional world. My question is that with such divergent teachers, is there enough cohesion of technique being taught? I question how students transfer from one teacher to the next over their years of training. While emphasis on students' individual creativity greatly benefit their individual pathways, I question the apparent individuality of technique classes and question how skill levels are gauged and assessed. While it seems possible (likely?) for a student to have six different technique teachers over the course of three years, I will put forth the question to consider whether there is a need for pedagogical consistency for strength and technical clarity to grow. This is a small point, but leads me to the suggestion of more communication amongst part-time faculty technique teachers. I would suggest that greater communication between the part-time teachers may rectify some potential discrepancies and provide general support for both students and teachers from different classes. I believe some consistency is required for physical training to be most productive. It may also benefit the department to have more clearly defined criteria for determining year levels and final assessments. The department (both faculty and students) may benefit from more clearly defining its philosophy in teaching contemporary dance techniques.

✓ **RECOMMENDATION (#4):** Clarify departmental philosophy on teaching technique and increase communication amongst part-time teachers.

In my interviews with both students and part-time faculty, there emerged a consistent debate over the number of curricular contemporary dance technique classes available to the students. The concern is that students (and some part-time faculty) do not feel they have enough physical training to prepare their bodies for the physical demands of performing their own, or other choreographers', works. Further, that a student emerging from the department is not equipped with the technical expertise and strength to enter the contemporary dance community at a professional performance level. At present, the department's mandatory contemporary technique course offers four (4) technique classes a week: specifically, one each weekday, except

Wednesday. The particular question posed was centred around the necessity of the 'Wednesday gap'. Students and part-time faculty expressed concern that the gap interrupts the momentum of the week's work and does not support the physical demands of the students who are eager to train everyday.

This is a familiar concern to university dance departments and there are some standard perspectives and responses. Young dancers are often eager for 'more, more, more' and there is sometimes reluctance to take the initiative personally to fill the gaps experienced in a course. I understand the Wednesday gap has been established to allow for guest teachers and extra workshops to be scheduled into an existing curricular timeslot. I highly support the department's initiative to invite more high-profile guest artists into the studios to conduct master-classes. Other options to expand curricular content include guests to lecture on dance writing, grant-writing, and liaisons with professional associations, when financial resources allow. While it is true that a professional contemporary dancer needs to train everyday and that consistency is essential for technical growth and strength-building, the focus of the department clearly states it focuses on 'choreography and creative process'. I do not feel the 'Wednesday gap' poses a significant problem.

New courses

The department has responded to the need to expand the base of technical training repertory with its pending inclusion of a somatics and anatomy course. This is a timely response to shifts in contemporary training.

Academic course

The department's one academic course – Dance History – has suffered at the hands of the recent budget cuts to the department. It has been cut back from six to three credits – making it a half-year course. The problems with this course (and the inadequacy of its current instructor – non-renewable part-timer) have been acknowledged by the department chair and we discussed it at some length. Additionally, student complaints about this course have been long-standing and consistent. This course emerges as an area in clear need of re-evaluation within the department.

It is this particular course that provokes my one strong concern and recommendation for the curricular content of the degree and the department as a whole. While the program clearly focuses on creative process and preparing students for careers in contemporary dance creation and performance, I feel the responsibility of its placement within the university at large is to also open avenues for further study in related fields. Some students expressed interest in pursuing graduate work eventually, or immediately, and this one academic course could provide the very basics in introducing the discipline of dance studies to students interested in pursuing that direction. To my perspective, it is indicative of a real shortcoming in the inclusion of intellectual work in the department's curriculum. For real creative individuality to be nourished, it is my opinion that the mind must be resourced with a rigorous understanding of current aesthetic frameworks and the cultural concerns that underpin them. I feel it is the advantage of a university education to be part of an intellectual tradition that rests on this kind of self-knowledge so that students do not, unnecessarily 're-invent the wheel', but can learn from artists of the past and delve fully into creating dances/artworks that reflect current concerns and are relevant to contemporary society. For this, I feel, some mastery of critical perspectives on the past and current art practices is necessary to be part of, not only the Montreal dance community, but expand its limits to further fields.

Apparently, student complaints about the dance history course has been long-standing and rest on both the current instructor and the course content. The attempt to cover all dance history from antiquity to contemporary times is far too ambitious a task for one teacher in one term course, and not the most appropriate content for contemporary dance students. I feel the focus on too broad a time span undermines the potential value of such a course. I feel that the distinction between a university dance department and a conservatory training program is that university training should also equip the student with the basic means to make the next step to another university department or degree or university setting. Of course, each department maintains its distinct focus and cannot be 'all things to all people', but a certain acknowledging of its own parameters is essential for preparing a student for graduating and venturing into other communities. There has been an explosion over the past ten years in dance studies at university. Dance studies is a broad term that can include history, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, feminist critical theory, and information / methodology from other such disciplines. While the intellectual explosion is recent, the outcome has been essential in transforming the manner, methodology and content of dance training and education at university. Drawing from my initial point that a department cannot cover all bases – particularly a small, focused department like Concordia's with an established record of success in fulfilling its particular mandate – I think this discrepancy should be noted and some small step taken to bridge a potentially widening gap between Concordia dance department and the rest of the university, and between Concordia's dance department and other dance departments.

It is true that university communities are expanding past old parameters of traditional notions of purely academic, intellectual work, and Concordia University, as a whole, pursues this creative tension between traditional and innovative role within society. However, dance studies is itself (arguably) at the forefront of interdisciplinary intellectual and creative research. I feel it is most appropriate for the dance department at Concordia to be part of this growing new area that spans theory and practice. While I do not at all mean to suggest the department shift its focus, I do feel it is the role of a university community to at least stay current with, and provide some means of linking students to, this innovative new arena of study. I connect this concern with that expressed under *Library resources* to update print and video resources so that students may at least informally, and independently, pursue these areas of information and debate.

RECOMMENDATION (#1): I strongly recommend a re-evaluation of the History course itself to focus more clearly on providing relevant historical information and on honing the students critical thinking skills. I suggest the dance history course be altered to a 'dance studies' focus and include a major component of 20th century contemporary dance history. This course should also introduce elements of aesthetics, take a critical perspective on recent and current contemporary dance practices, and discuss cultural movements and the artists espousing their attendant aesthetic values. An alternative approach could be to consider including in the degree curriculum a course in cultural theory to be taken outside the department. This option could also possibly fulfill the need to open the door to intellectual work in dance, educate dancers about their own placement in society at large, and feed into the choreographers' growing sense of themselves as artists within Canadian society. This would also somewhat prepare students intellectually for the possibility of further university education.

xi. Opportunities for any collaboration or partnerships

The department benefits greatly from its geographical location in the thriving city of Montreal with its renowned dance community. The department has paid due attention to creating and sustaining links to the Montreal dance community at large.

Connections made

The department's initiatives to make links with the Festival International de Nouvelle Danse are also noteworthy. They have succeeded in organizing workshops with incoming international artists that offer a valuable mode of expanding students' aesthetic and technical repertoire as well as opening their perspectives to communities further afield.

A considerable connection has been established with Studio 303 – an innovative and experimental studio in downtown Montreal that houses rehearsal space and a performance venue – in two regards: (1) The department rents the studio for students' end of term shows thereby placing student works directly into the professional environment and encouraging contacts and visibility in the professional milieu; and (2) Students engaging in Independent Studies courses are given work placements here to gain professional experience. (see section on *Student Retention*)

The department has made links with the National Theatre School by gaining access to production courses for dance students. This liaison could prove highly fruitful for sharing teaching resources and expertise, as well as establishing productive links between dance and theatre students that could prove productive after graduation.

Guest artists / teachers

While certain community individuals have been invited to conduct particular workshops in professional skills, like grant writing, the student interviews I conducted revealed a general desire amongst students for more connection to the professional community by way of inviting local, high profile guest artists to teach and lead workshops. While I understand the Wednesday morning time-slot (the day off technique class) is reserved for such occasions, there was a general sense that it was not being sufficiently utilized in this capacity. I understand there are serious budgetary considerations to be negotiated with inviting guests, but I would certainly support any increase in this type of professional connection the budget would allow.

Potential for a 'Professional day'

I would suggest, at this point, a very productive practice recently initiated in Toronto for dance students here might prove similarly beneficial to dance students at Concordia and Montreal (and potentially further afield). A program called *On the Move* recently successfully completed its pilot run in Toronto. It was a day-long series of meetings and presentations by various professional associations and organisations, including funding bodies and the Ontario version of a dancers' association (CADA). The purpose of the day was to acquaint dance students, about to embark on professional careers, with the various professional support structures and resource people in the community that are available to help direct the professional workings of the independent dance artist. Such a formal and concentrated method of professional liaison-making proved very worthwhile and productive for the students. If the cost of mounting such an event were shared by various pertinent institutions that house such upcoming dance artists, there might be little expense at instigating such an event.

Links within Concordia

As stated above, the relative isolation – and self-sufficiency – of the dance department has proven to be one of its great strengths. Some students expressed some displeasure, however, at feeling isolated from the rest of the university community. Informal working partnerships between music and theatre and dance students seem to rectify somewhat this perceived sense of isolation.

One outcome from recent budgetary cutbacks, has been the transfer of students out of the department for certain courses that the department can no longer afford to run. This means students are now training in aspects of production and design arts outside the department. These links could prove fruitful for students by connecting them to communities outside their own department. However, student feed back on these courses external to the department revealed disappointment about the low level of demand.

xii. Numbered list of recommendations for improvement and development

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RECOMMENDATION: review dance history course

I strongly recommend that the dance history course be altered to a 'dance studies' focus and include a major component of 20th century contemporary dance history. This course should also introduce elements of aesthetics, take a critical perspective on recent and current contemporary dance practices, and discuss cultural movements and the artists espousing those values.

There are no budgetary implications to this recommendation.

2. RECOMMENDATION: update library collection and renew relationship to department

I recommend that the dance librarian have more guidance in purchasing books and videos to update the collection and to gear additional acquisitions toward closer keeping with the focus of the dance department. The following elements should be addressed:

- (1) that a review of the relationship between the library and the department be conducted. The department needs to understand better the process by which materials are purchased for the dance collection and be more proactive in directing these purchases.
- (2) that the library update its information bank on agencies/organizations that distribute current dance literature and video material and consult the department regarding appropriate purchases.
- (3) that effort be made to expand the video collection significantly to include more videos of works by current British, American, and European choreographers. As valuable they are in themselves, enhancing a collection on historical ballet, Native dance practices and East Indian dance culture is extrinsic to the department's mandate and a potential misdirection of valuable financial resources.
- (4) that a review of the dance periodicals purchasing policy/practice be conducted to ensure the budget is being directed to augment the current collection with publications more relevant to the Concordia Dance department's course of study. This report recommends that a review of the current list of subscriptions be conducted to better align the incoming periodicals to the mandate of the department. (Subscriptions to *Dance Theatre Journal*, and *Ballet International* for example).

There are no budgetary implications to this recommendation.

3. RECOMMENDATION: upgrade sanitation of Loyola studios and upgrade sanitation safety of the downtown rehearsal studios

I recommend that the university supply necessary funds to upgrade the two downtown rehearsal studios in the interest of safety and health of the students. These upgrading measures should include installing locks on the doors so they can be locked from the inside, and adding the studios to the upgraded cleaning schedule for the dance department as a whole. Additionally, pay telephones should be added as an additional safety feature to the downtown studios.

There are budgetary implications to this recommendation.

4. RECOMMENDATION: clarify departmental philosophy on teaching technique and increase communication amongst part-time teachers

I recommend that the department more clearly define its philosophy regarding the kinds, and focus, of the contemporary dance techniques taught in relation to the program mandate. This should include instituting more formal communication amongst technique teachers at all levels (perhaps at the beginning and end of each term) to clarify the intent of the technique class and articulate what students should accomplish by its completion. Ideally, this would enhance a sense of development from one level/class to the next and build a sense of continuity over the program's three years.

There are no budgetary implications to this recommendation.

5. RECOMMENDATION: to limit growth in the near future

I recommend that no immediate steps to departmental growth be undertaken in the present or the immediate future. The current size of the program is sustainable financially and comfortably fills the department's facilities and staffing/faculty energies/abilities. I feel there is currently a sound balance that would not benefit from too aggressive an approach to expansion at the present time. I understand that the vision toward long-term growth includes a possible (eventual?) amalgamation of the fine arts disciplines into one building (music, drama, dance), and under one administrative umbrella. I feel, at this point, that the department benefits greatly from its independence and thrives particularly on its self-sufficiency. However, at some point in the future, the department would greatly benefit from a third full-time faculty position re-instated and maintained.

6. RECOMMENDATION: not to undertake major alterations to program as currently runs

Further to my introduction at the opening of this report, I expressed my opinion that I found the department to be a well-functioning, highly productive team that has benefited particularly from its self-sufficiency and independence. I feel the strength of the department lies in its consistency and clear adherence to its long-term mandate of fulfilling a particular vision toward supporting individual creativity and developing technical skills toward choreography. While there are bound to be minor points that could benefit from alterations, my strongest sense is that the dance department expresses very few complaints or serious shortcomings that require significant or immediate attention.

7. RECOMMENDATION: reinstate a third full-time faculty position (in time)

At some point in the near future, I feel this additional position should be re-instated and maintained to broaden the base of administrative and full-time faculty support in running the department. I make this recommendation with a vision to the longer term growth of the department as I realize the high budgetary implication of this addition is significant.

Summary

I will conclude this report with a résumé of my opening statement of support for the department and my expression of pleasure in conducting this review. Again, I feel we are very fortunate to have this very particular dance department in the Canadian landscape of contemporary dance. It fills a distinct need in the national dance education community that shows no signs of losing momentum. Located as it is in the thriving, dance-drenched city of Montreal, the department has supported and nurtured many successful artists over the years and remains consistent to its mandate. It has survived as a financially viable entity within the university, thriving on its own self-sufficiency and energy.

I bring my own perspective on dance training and education in the university setting that leads me to draw up the first two recommendations to expand the possibility for intellectual training for students, but on the whole, I feel the department should be celebrated as the cultural gem that it is, and guarded from too much invasion of new ideas that would only impede a working structure that has proven its worth and success, even in the face of the retirement of its founder.

Again, it has been a pleasure to conduct this program review and I hope my contribution may be taken in the spirit of helpful addition to a successful enterprise in education.